

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 OMB-01 IO-13 EUR-12 EA-07
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R 081100Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7640
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
CINCPAC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 COLOMBO 2353

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: SRI LANKA ELECTION: TWO WEEKS TO GO

REF: (A) COLOMBO 1934 (NOTAL; (B) COLOMBO 2305 (NOTAL);
(C) COLOMBO 2172

1. SUMMARY: MORALITY IN PUBLIC LIFE, THE ROLE OF THE PRESS,
AND THE FATE OF LAND REFORM ARE SOME TO THE ISSUES WHICH
DOIMINATE HOLITICAL SPEEDHCES AS THE ELECTION DRAWS NEAR;
FOREIGN POLICY IS STILL NOT A PROMINENT TOPIC OF DEBATE.
THE UNITED LEFT FRONT (ULF) IS BEING IGNORED BY THE MAJOR PARTIES
AS INCAPABLE OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT BUT HOPES TO PICK U
SOME TO THE YOUTH PROTEST VOTE. THE TAMILS DECLARE THEM-
SELVES UNWILLING TO JOIN ANY PARTY IN A POST-ELECTION
COALITION, BUT LEAVE OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF PASSIVE
SUPPORT FOR A MINORITY GOVERNMENT. AND BOTH THE UNP AND
SLFP SUPPORTERS CONFIDENTLY PREDIC THAT THEIR PARTY WILL
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FORM A GOVERNMENT ON ITS OWN. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH THE TRAINS RUNNING REALTIVELY SMOOTHLY AGAIN, THE
ELECTRICITY BACK ON, AND THE THREAT OF AN IMMINENT BANK
STRIKE ENDED, THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNTRY CAN RETURN TO
THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN AS IT ENTERS THE FINAL TWO
WEEKS BEFORE ELECTIONS JULY 21. THE THEMES ENUNCIATED

ON PARTY PLATFORMS DAY AFTER DAY BEGIN TO SOUND REPETITIOUS, AS NEWSPAPERS REPORT DUTIFULLY THE PARTY LEADERS' SPEECHES MADE NOT ONCE BUT SEVERAL TIMES A DAY. THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY NOW APPEARS TO BE HARPING ON THE IMPORPRIETY OF M.P.'S DRINKING TO EXCESS AND TAKING BRIBES. THE VOTER IS PRESUMED TO RECALL THE UNSEEMLY SCUFFLE BETWEEN TWO DRUNKEN GOVERNMENT MINISTERS ON THE ASSEMBLY FLOOR LAST YEAR AND THE SUPPORT BEING GIVEN BY THE SLFP TO TWO OF THEIR FORMER M.P.'S RUNNING THIS YEAR WHO WERE CONVICTED OF BRIBERY IN 1960.

3. THE PRESS, TOO, HAS BECOME AN ISSUE AS THE DAVASA/ SUN NEWSPAPER GROUP GAINS POPULARITY WITH ITS LIVELY BUT GENERALLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT TONE. THE SUN GLEE-FULLY HEADLINED WHAT THEY TOOK TO BE A THREAT FROM THE PM TO DAMAGE THIR TRANSPORT VANS. (SHE WAS REPORT-EDLY PIQUED BY A COMPARISON OF HER ASTROLOGICAL CHART WITH J.R.'S.) LAKE HOUSE PAPERS MAKE SOME EFFORT TO REPORT ALL SIDES OF THE POLITICAL DEBATE BUT ARE STILL UNDER FIRE FROM THEIR UNP-ORIENTED NON-EDITORIAL STAFF; THE PM HAS EVEN THREATENED A LOCK-OUT IF THE EMPLOYEES AGAIN RESORT TO STRIKE ACTION. THE COMMUNIST PAPER ATTHA WITH ITS HARD-HITTING ANTI-SIRIMAVO EDITORIALS IS REPORTED TO BE ONE OF THE MORE WIDELY-READ JOURNALS FOR CAMPAIGN NEWS. J.R. JAYEWARDENE HAS PROMISED A UNP GOVERNMENT WILL FREE THE PRESS, PARTICULARLY LAKE HOUSE AND THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOVERNMENT RADIO, ALTHOUGH THE PM SCORNFULLY RECALLS THE PRE-1970 TREETMENT METED OUT TO THE SLFP BY THE UNP-CONTROLLED PRESS.

4. AGRICULTURE MINISTER HECTOR KOBBEKADUWA IS CONSIST-ENTLY HAMMERING AT THE UNP ON HIS FAVORITE THEME OF LAND REFORM. HE HAS ALLEGED THAT THE UNP AND THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS, REPRESENTING ESTATE LABORERS, HAVE A SECRET PACT TO RESTORE THE STATUS QUO ANTE. POINTING OUT THAT THE UNP VOTED AGAINST HIS ESTATE NATIONALIZATION BILL IN 1972, KOBBEKADUWA PAINTS A DIRE PICTURE OF THE FATE OF THOSE NOW EMPLOYED ON NATIONALIZED LAND IF THE UNP SHOULD COME TO POWER.

5. ONE NON-ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN IS FOREIGN POLICY. EXCEPT FOR THE SHORT-LIVED UNP ANTI-SOVIET EMBASSY CAMPAIGN (REF A), THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE REFERENCE TO SRI LANKA'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS. NOR HAS THERE BEEN MUCH TALK ABOUT LAST YEAR'S NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE, EITHER ITS COST TO THE COUNTRY OR THE PRESTIGE IT PRESUMABLY BROUGHT SRI LANKA AS TEMPORARY CENTER OF THE THIRD WORLD. BOTH MAJOR PARTY MANIFESTOS TALK OF

NON-ALIGNMENT AND ANTI-IMPERIALISM IN THE SAME TERMS. OCCASIONALLY SLFP AND ULF SPEAKERS MAKE REFERENCE TO J.R.'S SUPPOSED WESTERN TIES; HIS FREE TRADE ZONE PROPOSAL HAS DRAWN CRITICISM AS HAVING THE EFFECT OF TURNING THE NATION OVER TO THE MULTINATIONALS. OTHERWISE STUMP SPEAKERS IGNORE INTERNATIONAL ISSUES, THE INDIAN OCEAN PEACE ZONE, AND THE ROLE OF SRI LANKA IN THE THIRD WORLD.

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6. THE ROLE OF THE TAMILS IN SRI LANKA HAS ALSO NOT BEEN MUCH OF AN ISSUE IN THE SOUTH, DESPITE THE AVOWED SECESSIONIST BELIEFS OF THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF). BOTH J.R. AND THE PM CONFINE THEMSELVES IN TAMIL AREAS TO VAGUE PROMISES TO END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TAMILSBM. THE TULF IS CONFIDENT OF WINNING MOST OF THE SEATS IT IS CONTESTING, AND TULF GENERAL SECRETARY, A. AMIRTHALINGAM HAS ATTACKED BOTH PARTIES. HE ALSO VOWED AT A WIDELY-PUBLICIZED PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HIS PARTY WOULD NOT SUPPORT ANY POTENTIAL POST-ELECTION GOVERNMENT OR JOIN ANY COALITION; HE LEFT OPEN THE OPTION OF PLAYING A POSSIBLY SUPPORTIVE ROLE BY NOT VOTING TO BRING DOWN A MINORITY GOVERNMENT.

7. IF THE TAMILS ARE CONFIDENT OF WINNING MOST OF THEIR SEATS, THE OTHER MINOR PARTY, THE UNITED LEFT FRONT, IS STILL HAVING DIFFICULTY CONVINCING THE VOTERS THAT IT

IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE UNP AND THE SLFP. BOTH
PARTIES SCORN THE ULF AS A THREE-HEADED MOSTROSITY
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WHICH DOESN'T HAVE THE UNITY TO SELECT A SINGLE-LEADER
AND IS INCAPABLE OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT. THE ULF
LINE THAT THEY REPRESENT THE ONLY ROAD TO SOCIALISM MAY
BE WINNING SOME VOTES, BUT THE SLFP IS COUNTERATTACKING
WITH THE ARGUMENT THAT THE REAL CONTEST IS BETWEEN THE
SLFP AND THE UNP; A VOTE FOR THE LEFT, THEN, IS ONLY
HELPING THE UNP.

8. ONE OF THE ELECTION'S REAL IMPONDERABLES CONTINUES
TO BE THE ATTITUDE OF THE YOUTH, EX-INSURGENTS, AND
"NEW LEFT" IN GENERAL. CLEARLY THEY REPRESENT A
DISAFFECTED, PROTEST VOTE OF SOME KIND. THE ULF IS
COANTING ON THE PRESENCE ON ITS PLATFORMS OF SOME OF THE
LEADERS OF THE 1971 INSURGENCY TO WIN OVER SYMPATHIZERS.
(AND THE SLFP, TOO, HES RECRUITED SOME REHABILITATED INSURGENTS TO
SPEAK ON ITS BEHALF.) NEVERTHELESS THERE IS STILL ANIMOSITY AMONG
THE INSURGENTS TO THE VEHEMENT DENUNCIATION THEY RECEIVED
FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY LEFTISTS (ESPECIALLY THE LSSP)
IN 1971. J.R. JAYEWARDENE, TOO, HAS SEEN THE POTENTIAL
IN THE INSURGENT-SYMPATHIZER VOTE. IN A SIGN FICANT DEVELOPMENT
THIS WEEK, J.R. PROMISED TO REXAMINE THE CASE OF
ROHANA WIJEWEERA, ORIGINAL INSURGENT
GURU, WHO HAS BEEN IN JAIL SINCE JUST BEFORE THE
INSURGENCY, FOR THE MASTERMINDING OF WHICH HE WAS
SENTENCED TO TWENTY YEARS. OBVIOUSLY STUNG BY THIS
THRUST, THE PM POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS THE UNP WHICH
HAD ORIGINALLY IMPRISONED WIJEWEERA. (THE PM RELEASED
HIM OUT OF GRATITUDE FOR JVP SUPPORT IN THE ELECTION,
THEN LATER RE-ARRESTED HIM.) SHE ALSO ARGUED THAT SHE
HAD THREATED THE INSURGENTS MORE LENIENTLY THAT J.R. WOULD
HAVE DONE IN HER PLACE.

9. WHILE BOTH PARTIES MAINTAIN THEY ARE EXPECTING TO
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WIN A MAJORITY ON JULY 21, THE UNP IS GIVEN MSCH THE
BETTER CHANCE TO FULFILL ITS BOAST. PREDICTIONS OF
JOURNALISTS AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN TONED DOWN IN RECENT
WEEKS -- PERHAPS THROUGH UNWILLINGNESS TO GET OUT ON A
LIMB AND PERHAPS IN RECOGNITION OF SOME SLFP RESURGENCE
(REF B). NEVERTHELESS BETTING S STILL HEAVILY WITH
THE UNP. THE SUN/DAVASA NEWSPAPER "PREDICT THE

ELECTION" CONTEST WE REFERRED TO IN REF C TWO WEEKS
AGO HAS COME DOWN FROM 90 TO 80 PERCENT OF ITS
ENTRANTS ANTICIPATING A UNP VICTORY (WE POINTED OUT
THEN THAT, AS A POLL, IT WAS UNSCIENTIFIC AND BIASED
TOWARD THE NEWSPAPER-READING PUBLIC; IT'S STILL THE
ONLY POLL IN TOWN.)
PERKINS

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Message Attributes

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